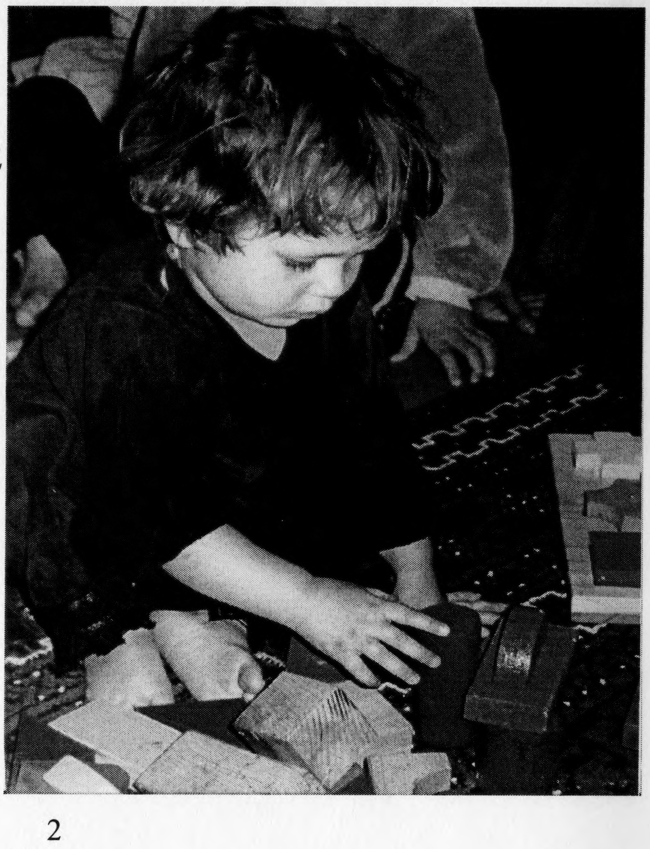
What we learned

Levels of knowledge and awareness about the benefits of play and playgroups

The level of knowledge about the benefits of play and playgroups is impressive among both parents and facilitators who took part in the review.
Even the younger facilitators, who SC staff know need more help, are able to describe specific and general benefits from a variety of play activities.

Parents
We grouped parent responses about the benefits of play under the following headings:
- A safe and clean place to play
- Learning about cleanliness/wanting to be clean
- Social skills and learning to be with other children and adults
- Meeting other children and adults/being in anew environment
- Getting ready for school and specific skills
- Physical development
- Language skills
- Children's enjoyment
- The future

Responses from parents suggest that of all the possible benefits, most value is placed on the social skills children develop in playgroups perhaps reflecting the attention given in Afghan culture to learning respect for other people, especially older people, and politeness. Children who have good *tarbia* (which refers to children's manners and the quality of their relationships with others) are polite, obedient, respectful, sociable and peaceful. So, frequently mentioned benefits of playgroups were learning good behavior and how to behave with other children, learning cooperation and politeness. Parents also valued playgroups as places where children can make new friends and learn friendship.



Several parents noted the benefits of children being required to put toys away in playgroup:
"They learn to organize things because after play they put everything in a bag or place."

Parents also recognize that playgroup provides an opportunity for children to be in a new situation with new people.
"Playgroup is an opportunity to meet other children and learn from each other."
"They [children] become familiar with things and people."
Parents noted that children's confidence (literally translated as courage) grows because of this.

Playgroups as preparation for school were specifically mentioned as a benefit:
"They get familiar with everything which is necessary for school. As I understand it, playgroup is necessary for school and

school is necessary for university."

Parents and other caregivers described a range of skills such as holding a pencil or learning names of shapes and colors. One skeptical big brother said:

"I have even seen very small children in the group count the spots on the spot dominoes."

Learning about time was mentioned in an interesting way:

"They [children] know the days of the week and time because every day they ask about the day of the playgroup"

We were surprised how often parents mentioned playgroups as an opportunity to develop language skills – speaking and talking (and fewer mentions for listening!).

"They [children] talk a lot with each other and with the teachers."

Many parents also commented on how their children talk about what they do at playgroup:

"When they [children] come back they talk about what they did at playgroup with friends and family."

Parents and facilitators also felt that children learned how to be clean or, more importantly, took steps to make themselves clean and smart for playgroup:

"They [children] become clean because they ask for a clean dress before going to playgroup and they comb their hair."

"My children say other children come clean and regularly to the group."

Frequently mentioned benefits were to do with playgroups being safe and clean places to play when parents were busy at work:

"Mothers feel comfort and happy as they know their children are busy in playgroups with at least on facilitator."

Another frequently mentioned benefit is the benefit of playgroups to children's physical development – specifically children's hands and feet and breathing become strong.

"Playing is good for their health. They [children] become strong."

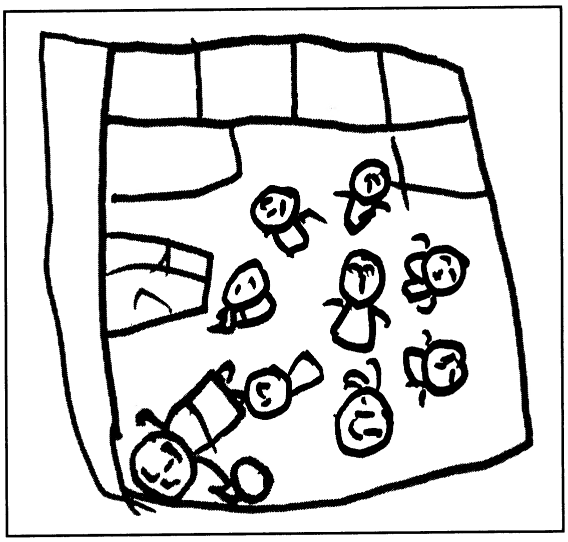
"As their [children's] body moves during play they grow and become strong."

Finally, we were interested to hear how many respondents linked children's play to learning very specific roles and skills for the future:

"They learn to organize their life through home play (pretend play); even they learn something about cooking."

'They get familiar with engineering because when my son comes from the group he tells us I am an engineer. I made a very good building today."

These and many other responses during interviews suggest that many caregivers have quite a literal literal understanding of the benefits of play.



Facilitators drawing of a group game

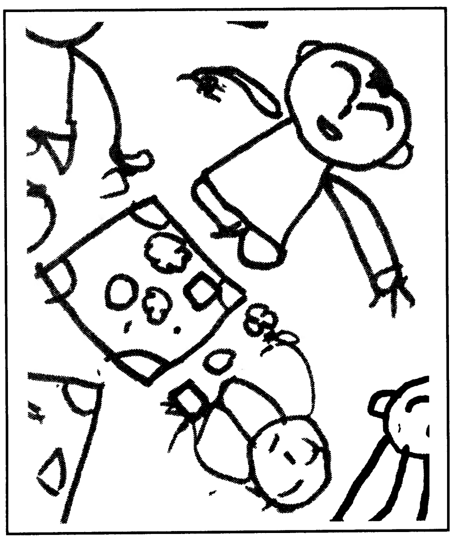
Compared with the baseline information, parents, generally speaking, described in more detail and gave more specific examples of how they play with their children but this maybe because they feel more comfortable talking with Save the Children staff and because Save the Children staff have improved their technique for asking questions.

"I play chasing. We played pretend cooking. I gave them rice and ghee and other necessary things and dishes. Then I helped them cook it. They put their dolls in place like a guest and sang songs for them."

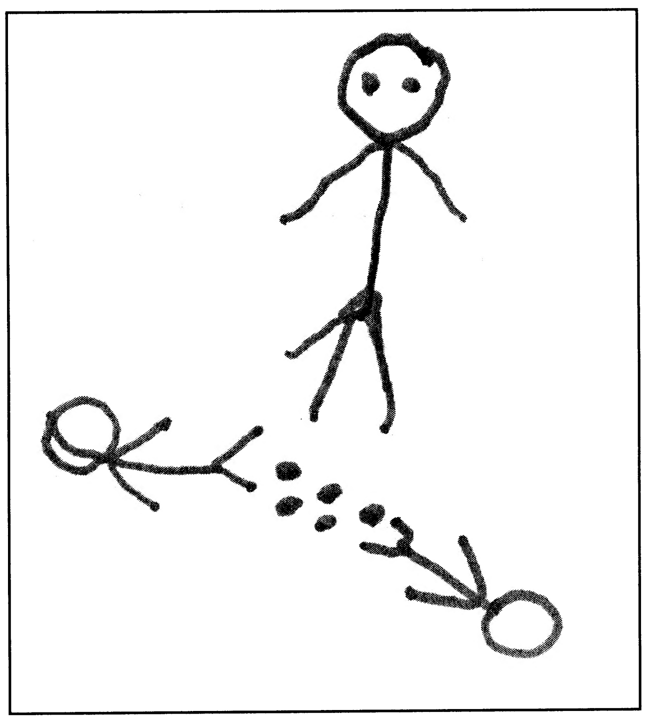
"I make them dolls and cars from empty boxes. My youngest child asked me to lie down like a donkey and take him for a ride and I do."
"We played doll. We gave a name for each of them and then every body tried to remember the names. I recited rhymes with my children."
"I play ball and on the swing every day with my children. They ask me to play after my work. My youngest child asks me to pretend to be a donkey and I do. I like them to be happy."
"Every night I play with the ball and dolls. My wife is busy so I play with my daughter to make her happy. Sometimes I have paper to make things like flowers."

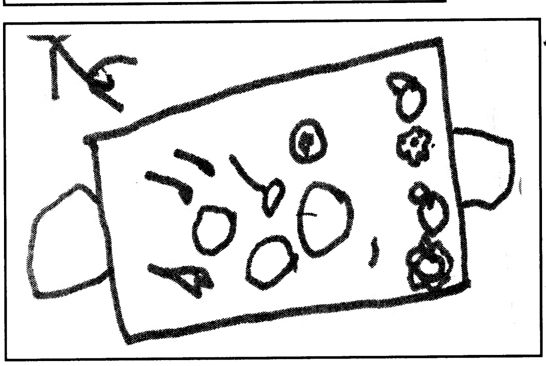
Facilitators

Facilitators tended to place more value in the specific cognitive skills children develop through play with toys in the box. In a drawing activity with ten facilitators in Khoja Hasan we asked them to draw and explain good things that happen to children at playgroup. They drew approximately 40 pictures but only two (five stones and pretend play – having tea) did not involve materials from the kits. Also, when prompted to discuss their picture the most replies were about developing physical or cognitive skills.



Facilitator's drawings of puzzle games, five stones and pretend play (having a party)





In Shi Khan facilitators ranked their ideas and the following were the five they considered to be the most important benefits of playgroups:

1. Children learn to/become clean.
2. Children become interested in school and their mind develops
3. Children learn names of colors
4. Children learn drawing
5. Children become polite and intelligent.

During discussion with Shi Khan facilitators mentioned a problem caused by distribution of WFP biscuits in the nearby school. They reported that a significant number of children had left playgroup to enroll at school (despite being under-age) because they wanted the biscuits. They were very concerned that the children were not in the best place for their development – a sign of their awareness of the importance of play for young children.

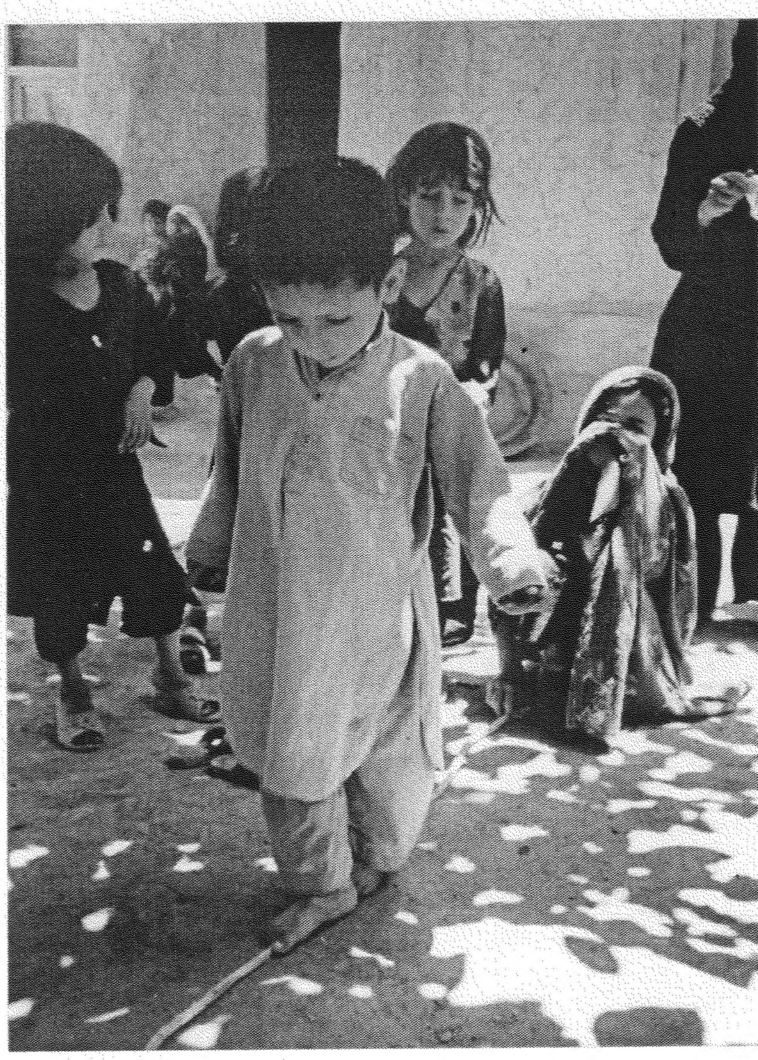
Identifying facilitators

The younger facilitators need more help during support visits. Most of the younger facilitators are in Khoja Hasan village in Shomali are young, some as young as 13 years old. They came forward to be facilitators because older women felt they were too busy. In fact, in all cases persuading people to be facilitators was difficult because households must give up the time of productive family members and their is no incentive, cash or otherwise, to make up for the loss.

Younger facilitators know as much about the benefits of play as their older counterparts but, unsurprisingly, they demonstrate fewer playgroup management skills, are less able to help children when they are, for example, upset or having a tantrum. Young facilitators also find community mobilization activities linked to playgroups more difficult because, understandably, they do not have sufficient status or confidence to for example, meet with parents to talk about the benefits of play. They also tend to become engrossed in play themselves – especially if older children are in the group too. Older facilitators tend to be mothers themselves and they have the maturity, status and experience with their own children to manage a variety of tasks at the same time; to be kind but firm; and to meet other parents.

Save the Children trained up to three facilitators per group but an interesting combination that exists in one of the Shi Khan clusters is a group facilitated by a mother and teenage daughter. This is an idea to pursue if more playgroups are established: teenage daughters can often spend more time in the playgroup whereas mothers can provide leadership in the group and are able to talk with other parents.

One unexpected impact for some facilitators appears to have been on their self-esteem. Although none of the facilitators said this themselves in a direct way, from discussions on visits to playgroups, observations of playgroups and discussions for the review, it is clear that facilitators know that what they are doing is important and a reasonable assumption then is that feelings of self esteem have increased.



The father of one of the youngest facilitators remarked that: "Before she was a facilitator she never spoke in front of me. Now she talks to me and she is more confident." Attending training together and meetings about playgroups, and taking part in a common activity, is an opportunity for older girls and women to meet and develop an identity within their community.

The location of playgroups

All the playgroups take place in people's homes. Many homes in Shomali are built with high walls that are integral to the building (compound). The entrance is at ground level where tools, fodder etc are stored. Living quarters are on the first floor up a flight of stairs.

Playgroups are in rooms typically measuring 4-5 meter square and often there is no outside play space within the compound where children can run around and play. Facilitators are unlikely to take the children outside the compound unless the outside play space is immediately outside – which is also unlikely because house entrances open onto narrow lanes in the village. This means the scope for physical activities is fairly limited in some playgroups. More attention needs to be given to helping communities select a venue for playgroup – and facilitators may have to work in other people's houses. (Some facilitators do this already but they tend to be in houses belonging to someone from their extended family.)

We can introduce books in playgroups now

In discussions with facilitators in Shi Khan and Khoja Hasan (both places where most facilitators cannot read), we shared a selection of books and magazines that we would like to have in playgroups. After they had looked at them we asked how they would use them. The response was very encouraging: they said they would look at the pictures with the children, that they would read them (those that can read); that they would ask their father to read it to them at night and memorize the story for telling with the pictures the next day; and they would ask someone who can read to visit the playgroups. All ways of sharing the books in the playgroup that were suggested are good but we especially want to follow up the idea of having someone visit the group to read. In many cases, facilitators can identify a friend or family member to help them but we need to follow this closely to check it is happening and to check that the reading helpers share the books with children in a good way. We can also use it as an opportunity for children in nearby schools to practice their reading and to build links between the playgroups and the schools.

Involvement of older children in the group

Visits to playgroups and records of children attending show that quite a few children are of school age. Because schools often have several shifts it is possible for children to attend playgroup and school but many older participants, especially the girls are not going to school.

Older children attend for a number of reasons: it is fun and they enjoy it; they come to take care of a younger brother or sister; they come to help the facilitator. All these are good reasons and we prefer not to turn children away. However, if there are too many older children, the nature of the group changes – it stops being a place for pre-school age children.

Use of local play materials and toys

There is not much use of local play materials and toys such as household utensils, water, sticks, stones, leaves etc. In a few groups, there is a small selection of cups and so forth and cloth dolls but not much more. Most groups have had a least one clay session – as evidenced by the many clay models we have seen. Facilitators say the children are not interested in local play materials (they prefer the toys in the box). However, the play with local materials does require more effort from facilitators: they have to find materials and in some cases borrow from their kitchen, which their families might not like. They also have to make these materials as interesting for children as the toy kit toys. The facilitators in Khoja Hasan said that children's favorite toys were the ones other children played with! What they seemed to imply was



Clay on a cloth and a water pot

that if there are children busy at play others want to join in. Perhaps we can capitalize on this to increase use of local and found materials for play. If facilitators have a group of children engaged in play with local materials other children will want to join in.

Recommendations for the final quarter of 2003 (October – December)

Support and practice
The level of knowledge seems quite high and more training is not needed at the moment, except a short training that shows facilitators how they can use books in the playgroup. However, facilitators do need more support in the playgroup with some specific activities and to see good practice demonstrated.
Recommendation: All facilitators should be encouraged to have materials set up for:

- pretend play, for example a shop, a tea party, or cooking
- water play (outside)
- local materials – sand, spoons, twigs, leaves etc

(Clay is good but it is difficult to manage every time playgroup meets. Work with clay can be set up once every few weeks.)

The level of support required is often difficult to give one-on-one, given the number of Education Officers in the ECD team.
Recommendation: Make a visit to one playgroup to demonstrate and support good practice, and invite facilitators from one or two other playgroups to attend.

Keeping a record of attendance
Only a few groups are keeping a record of children's attendance. Given the informal nature of playgroup we don't want formal school registers but we do need to now if children are coming to playgroup regularly. This will become important as we start tracking children when/if they move to school. Many playgroup facilitators 41(37 out of 40 in Shamali and 4 out of 30 in Kabul for example) cannot read and so keeping a record is much more difficult - but it is not impossible. For example, instead of having a written name, children could have a symbol. Or they could have an object or card to represent their attendance. There is also quite a lot of learning potential in this idea for children if they are responsible for putting an object in a bag or hanging up a picture when thy get to playgroup.
Recommendation: Develop methods for keeping a record of attendance and make sure facilitators and children can and do use them.

Books in the playgroups
Recommendation: Introduce a small set of reading books as soon as possible. Children can enjoy books without being able to read. Facilitator's friends/family or children from the nearby school can read the books to children in addition to children enjoy.
Recommendation: Develop a short, half-day training for playgroup facilitators that will help them to use books in playgroups
Recommendation: Work with the school in Khoja Hasan and Shi Khan to find children who can be reading volunteers in playgroups.

Recommendations for the end of project evaluation
The final evaluation should:

- involve activities with children
- plan in advance to ensure involvement of men and find ways to involve them more
- find out how often parents go to playgroup
- talk with parents whose children do not go to playgroup

Summary

Number of playgroups In Kabul city: 11 In Shomali: 29 In Mazar city: 60
Number of children taking part (girls/boys): In Kabul city: 168 (Girls 100, Boys 68) In Shomali: 418 (Girls 252, Boys 166) In Mazar city: 1094 (Girls 574, Boys 520)
Number of facilitators trained: In Kabul city: 30 In Shomali: 60 In Mazar city: 180
Number of other organizations taking part in training: 8 in Kabul and 5 in Mazar (ACF, Save the Children UK, Save the Children Sweden, IRC, HRA, AWRC, HA, Habitat, AIM, CAFÉ, YCDP, representatives from the Dept of Kindergartens
Number of participants from other organizations taking part in training: 26 in Kabul 10 in Mazar
Number of play kits produced: 200
Number of play kits distributed: 126

Record of support/monitoring visits to playgroup

Quantitative Summary of 40 visits to playgroups in Kabul city and Shomali

<table>
<tr><td>Date:
May 27 – 31st August 2003</td><td colspan="5">Number of children:
25 groups (average of 13.7 per group)
343 children (154 girls, 111 boys, 78 not specified)</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">Place: Shomali and Kabul</td><td colspan="5">Length of session:</td></tr>
<tr><td>½ hour</td><td>1 hour</td><td>1 ½ hours</td><td>2 hours</td><td>No length specified</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>1</td><td>12</td><td>7</td><td>2</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Morning playgroups: 21</td><td colspan="3">Afternoon playgroups: 4</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Are all the children involved?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES:34 NO: 1
No, but by end of session, all were involved: 5</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Does the facilitator encourage children’s play? (For example, asking questions about what children are doing, suggesting ideas for play, asking opinions or joining in imaginative play)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES: 35 NO: 2
Somewhat: 3</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Does the playgroup include time for free play, group games, and story/rhymes/songs?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES: 33 NO: 7
5 had no story/rhyme/song session, 2 had only free play time</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">During free play can children decide what they want to play with?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES – 39
NO – 1 (needed guidance)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">During free play can children decide who they want to play with?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES: 40</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Is there a variety of play material available for children?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES: 36 NO: 3
No response: 1</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Are local play materials (for example, water, cups, clay, cloth etc) available for children to play with?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES: 22 (cloth dolls, empty boxes, cloth, small dishes, beans) NO: 18</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Does the facilitator promote good behavior in a positive way (for example, by talking with children, with praise and encouragement, by giving them responsibility)?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES: 36 (but two were very weak as it was only the first session NO: 2
No Answer:2</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Are any parents joining in the playgroup today?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES: 36 NO: 4
Mothers, grandmothers, aunts and elder sisters of both participants and facilitators regularly attended</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">Can the children play inside or outside as they wish?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="6">YES: 35 (in some cases, though, the children preferred the inside because of the heat)
NO: 2 (in both cases, it was the first session and so the groups stayed inside)
No answer: 3</td></tr>
</table>

Responses from interviews with caregivers about playgroups and children's play

Responses from interviews with women in Shomali

These responses are from 32 mothers and one aunt. 76 of their children (49 girls and 27 boys) go to playgroup.

Respondents children's ages:

	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years
Girls	2	10	16	8	6	3	4
Boys	4	3	7	4	8	1	

NB In the following tables, responses marked with a number mean this was the number of times an item was mentioned, not the number of respondents who mentioned it. Thus if a respondent mentioned an item three times we recorded it three times.

Is the playgroup good for children's learning? Yes 33
Why? A safe place to play The play group stops children from going to dirty places or to the street or the lane 19 It is safe place away from danger It keeps them busy 5 As the children are in a good place mothers feel comfort and happy 6 As they become busy in a good way and enjoy themselves they do not bother their elders Learning about cleanliness/wanting to be clean They learn to keep themselves clean 11 Children want to be clean and smart/make themselves clean and smart for playgroup 9 Social skills and learning to be with other children and adults They learn friendship/make friends 21 They can recognize good and bad things 5 They learn good behavior/how to behave with other children 21 They learn to be kind 10 They learn to cooperate 10 They become polite 19 They learn to organize their life through home play (pretend play) 10 They learn to organize things because after play they put everything in a bag or place. 5 They become courageous/confident 11 They can talk in front of elders2 They learn about human values 4 They learn hospitality (Politeness? Greeting?) 4 Meeting other children and adults/being in a new environment They get familiar with things and people 15 Playgroup is an opportunity to meet other children and learn from each other 8 Children play together 5 They become familiar with new toys and names 7

<u>Getting ready for school and specific skills</u> Makes children ready for school 16 They learn how to hold a pen for writing 6 They learn counting 7 They get familiar with chalk, blackboard and pen and paper 7 They know the days of the week and time because very day they ask about the day of the play group 7 They learn colors and shapes 9 They learn games/traditional games 7 Through play with bead threading they learn to thread the needle for their grandmothers so they get familiar about the school activities They learn drawing 5 They learn to make toys They pretend they are teacher and they learn to be a good teacher 2 <u>Physical development</u> Their hands and feet become strong 13 They grow and become strong 15 Their breathing becomes strong 3 They grow healthy 6 <u>Language skills</u> They understand soon and better. 11 They learn speaking/talking. 24 They learn to listen.3 During the night they become busy to tell about their activities to each other (sisters and brothers). <u>Children's enjoyment</u> They enjoy themselves and feel happy 17 <u>The future</u> They learn to work 4 It is good for their futures 8 <u>General comments</u> Through play with toys their body and mind develops 6 They will become clever 21 They get more skills 19 Their mind develops 5 Playgroup makes them to think and learn more 2
Did you play with your children recently (in the last week)?
Yes 21 No: 12
We played with a ball and a useless battery. 2 I played with my son with a plastic car. I make a car for him and my daughter. I played with a ball and pillows with my four-year old daughter and we pretended that we had some guests. 3 I am not patient to play with children We made toys. 2. I made a doll with my daughter. 2 I play with them especially when they cry or disturb me. I play chasing. I make them dolls and cars from empty boxes. 3. My youngest child asked me to lie down like a donkey and take him for a ride and I do. My other children ask me to prepare a party and they act as guests. 2 I told a story to my sons and asked them to tell something to each other. As well, I make them toys like

Save the Children

Early Childhood Development Project
Kabul, Shomali and Mazar-i Sharif

December 6 2003 – January 6 2004

Final Report

submitted to

UNICEF

by

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March 17, 2004

kites, balls (from cloth) and a car (from empty boxes) Sometimes I play drum and my daughters dance. 2. I tell them a story and I almost made a swing. I make dolls for them because all of them are girls. 2. I make toys with my children – a doll for my daughter and a dog for my son. 2 We played pretend cooking. I gave them rice and ghee and other necessary things and dishes. 2 Then I helped them cook it. They put their dolls in place like a guest and sang songs for them. 10 I play drum and sing song with my children.5. I make them clay toys like plates, cups, car and vas. 3. I play hide and seek with my children and nieces and nephews. 2. I have no time to play with my children. We played doll. We gave a name for each of them and then every body tried to remember the names. I recited rhymes with my children.
Can you give me a few examples of things children do at the playgroup?
Yes 33
They throw the beanbag to each other. They play with balls and puzzle boxes. 2 They play the drum and sing songs. 2 They play with a ball which has a bell 3 and with different shapes and color and with wooden toys They build everything from room, tower, house They play with toys as my four year old daughter tells A rope, but I haven't been yet They play with toys. 4 They play with a ball and with their dolls that they take from home. 4 They play with a rope and my children say with wooden toys. 3 Balls, rope and different wooden toys but I have not seen it yet. There toys are puzzle box 3, bag of wooden blocks 5, rattle, picture dominoes 9, spot dominoes 5, ball 18 and rope 19 They say they play with beanbags 3, balls and other toys but they don't know the name. They play with balls, beanbags and do other traditional games 3. They build a room and castle from wooden toys. They draw pictures and they walk along the rope. They have dolls 9 and bead threading 5, different shapes and colored wooden toys 5. They build. They play with dolls and other things. They play with beanbags and balls and they like it very much. They play different games. They play with balls, beanbags 5, they walk along rope, they play with wooden toys. The times I have seen my children in the playgroup they seem happy. They play with toys and games. They play with homemade toys like dolls2. They play with bead threading that they like 3, with balls 7, rattles and xylophones 5. They draw pictures on the blackboard 5. They play with homemade clay toys, jig saw puzzles 6, Shape inset tray 2, Swing 2, homemade wooden cars, staking toy 2, with chalk and black board 8, they recite rhymes 3, They play with empty plastic bottles and flowers 2 They play with empty boxes and sticks 4,

Responses from women in Kabul

These responses are from 21 mothers. 37 of their children (24 girls and 13 boys) go to playgroup.

Respondents children's ages:

	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years
Girls	1	6	5	6	5	1	
Boys	1	2	2	5	3		

Is the playgroup good for children's learning? Yes: 21 No: 0
Why? <u>A safe place to play/keeps them busy</u> The play group stops children from going to dirty places or to the street or the lane. 6 It is safe place away from danger 3 It keeps them busy 12 Mothers feel comfort and happy as they know their children are busy in the groups at least with one facilitator 5 The mothers find time to do the house chores 3 <u>Learning about cleanliness/wanting to be clean</u> They learn to keep themselves clean 8 Children want to be clean and smart/make themselves clean and smart for playgroup 3 <u>Social skills and learning to be with other children and adults</u> They learn friendship/make friends 13 They can recognize good and bad things 5 They learn good behavior/how to behave with other children 20 They learn to be kind 4 They learn to cooperate 7 They become polite 6 They learn to organize their life through home play (pretend play) 10 They learn to organize things because after play they put everything in a bag or place. 3 They become courageous/confident 31 It stops them to be more stubborn 2 They can make decision as now my child says it is the group day I do not want to go somewhere else with you. They learn hospitality (politeness?) 4 They learn to be patient 2 They become careful (take care of toys etc) 8 <u>Meeting other children and adults/being in anew environment</u> They get familiar with things and people 4 Playgroup is an opportunity to meet other children and learn from each other 3 Children play together 2 They get familiar with new toys and names 4

<u>Getting ready for school and specific skills</u> Makes children ready for school 11 They learn how to hold a pen for writing 6 They learn counting 2 They get familiar with chalk, blackboard and pen and paper 5 They know the days of the week and time because very day they ask about the day of the play group 3 They learn colors and shapes 13 They learn games/traditional games 6 They become curious and raise questions about every thing 3 They learn to make toys from local materials 4 <u>Physical development</u> Their hands and feet become strong 6 They grow and become strong 15 Their breathing becomes strong 2 Their body grows perfectly 2 They grow healthy 5 Their interest increases in sports and different games 3 <u>Language skills</u> They understand soon and better. 6 They learn speaking/talking 21 They learn to listen They learn new stories and rhymes and tell for other children in the house 3 <u>Children's enjoyment</u> They enjoy themselves and feel happy 11 <u>The future</u> They learn to work It is good for their futures 4 <u>General comments</u> Through play with toys their body and mind develops 2 They will become clever 11 They get more skills 16 It develop their talent 4 Their mind develops 14 It is good for their learning 2 They think about every thing 3
Did you play with your children recently (in the last week)?
Yes: 6 No: 15
I told story for my children. 2 I recited and taught them new rhymes. I made cloth dolls for my daughter and as well I played ball with her. 3 I have never thought about playing with children yet, but thank the program that taught me to play with children. My husband plays with children, but I have not played with them. I play with my children even though my family members laugh at me. I played ball with my children
Can you give me a few examples of things children do at the playgroup?
Yes:20 No: 1

They play with: Stacking toy Picture dominoes 5 Cloth dolls 15 Xylophone 2 Black board and chalk 6 Empty plastic bottles Waking along the rope Wooden blocks 14 Different size balls 17 Jig saw puzzle 3 Posters with cartoon Jumping with rope 13 Bead threading 2 Bean bags 3 Spot dominoes 5 Sticks 2 Leaves 2 Homemade cars	They tell story and talk about different things 6 They do role-play 2 They tell jokes 4 They recite rhymes 9 They play traditional games 2 They play drum and sing songs 3

Responses from men

These responses are from 5 fathers and 1 big brother. They are speaking about 10 children (4 girls and 6 boys) go to playgroup.

Respondents children's ages:

	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years
Girls		2	2	1	1		
Boys		1	1		2		

Is the playgroup good for children's learning?
Yes: 6

Why?

A safe place to play
The play group stops children from going to dirty places or to the street or the lane 4
Stops them playing bad games 1
It keeps them busy 3

Learning about cleanliness/wanting to be clean
Children want to be clean and smart/make themselves clean and smart for playgroup 1

Social skills and learning to be with other children and adults
They learn friendship/make friends 5
They can recognize good and bad things 1
They learn good behavior/how to behave with other children 2
They learn to be kind 4
They learn to cooperate 3
They become polite 1
They learn to organize their life through home play (pretend play) 1
Builds self-confidence/self-esteem 5

Getting ready for school and specific skills
Makes children ready for school 2
They learn counting 4
They get familiar with chalk, blackboard and pen and paper 1
They learn colors and shapes 2
They learn games/traditional games 1

Meeting other children and adults/being in a new environment
They get familiar with things and people 2
Playgroup is an opportunity to meet other children and learn from each other 1
They imitate their teacher and learn good things 1

<u>Physical development</u> Their hands and feet become strong 1 They grow and become strong 6 Their breathing becomes strong 2 <u>Language skills</u> They learn speaking/talking 5 They learn to listen 1 They can pass a message 1 <u>Children's enjoyment</u> They enjoy themselves and feel happy 4 <u>The future</u> They learn to work and it is good for their futures 3 <u>General comments</u> Through play with toys their body and mind develops 8 They will become clever 3 Play is a kind of learning 1
Did you play with your children recently (in the last week)?
Yes: 3 No: 3
As usual when I got back from my work they asked me to play ball. When they get tired I sometimes tell them a story or a joke. I play ball and on the swing every day with my children. They ask me to play after my work. My youngest child asks me to pretend to be a donkey and I do. I like them to be happy. Every night I play with the ball and dolls. My wife is busy so I play with my daughter to make her happy. Sometimes I have paper to make things like flowers. I have time or interest to play with children (the big brother).
Can you give me a few examples of things children do at the playgroup?
Yes: 6
They play with dolls, balls, rope and colored blocks They play with balls, the xylophone, colored wooden pieces, a jigsaw puzzle They play with the rope, balls, puzzle box, jig-saws, blackboard and chalk, cloth dolls and the xylophone They play with balls and rope, the recite rhymes, they play with other toys in the box. Girls usually play with dolls. They have a rattle and ropes, dolls, a drum….they say rhymes and tell stories They play with balls and ropes, the puzzle box and picture and spot dominoes, the drum and they sing songs.

"I have even seen very small children in the group count the spots on spot dominoes."

"When they come back they talk about what they did at playgroup with friends and family."



Save the Children.

Save the Children is a leading international nonprofit child-assistance organization working in 40 countries worldwide. Our mission is to create real and lasting change in the lives of children in need. Since 1985, Save the Children has been addressing the critical needs of Afghan children in their own country and in refugee camps in Pakistan. Programs include maternal and child health care, education, microfinance, landmine education, psycho-social support activities, drought response and food relief.

Save the Children is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, a worldwide network of 30 independent Save the Children organizations working in more than 100 countries to ensure the well-being and protect the rights of children everywhere.



These drawings were made by internally displaced children living in Kabul, Afghanistan as part of a review of the activities implemented by Save the Children USA to support their well-being.

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

The goal of the project was enhanced opportunities for young children's social, emotional and cognitive development. (This is one of five education results in the overall Save the Children's Afghanistan program results framework.)

The intended outcomes of the project were these:

- Increased capacity in families and communities to create opportunities for play
- Increased awareness of the importance of play for pre-school age children's development
- Strengthened engagement of families and communities in support of their children's learning
- Increased numbers of organizations that can support community-based Early Childhood Development (ECD) activities

The key activities/inputs to achieve these outcomes were these:

- Conduct a preliminary study of community awareness of/attitudes towards play in relation to children's learning and development
- Mobilize communities to establish Save the Children (SC) ECD playgroups
- Collect and disseminate baseline data
- Prepare play kits
- Train SC playgroup facilitators
- Distribute play kits
- Support and monitor SC playgroups
- Train trainers in other NGOs/organizations
- Select books for play kits
- Train SC facilitators about sharing books with children
- Conduct mid and end of project evaluation

ACTIVITIES DURING THE GRANT

1. Conduct a preliminary study of community awareness of/attitudes towards play in relation to children's learning and development

Irene McWeeney, with SC ECD staff, conducted a study during February and March 2003 to collect information about community awareness of and attitudes towards play in relation to children's learning and development. This report was attached to SC's first quarter report to UNICEF.

2. Community mobilization to establish Save the Children supported playgroups

SC started to establish playgroups in Khoja Hasan village in Shomali in April 2003. Between April and September, 110 playgroups were created: 39 in Shi Khan and Khoja Hasan villages in Shomali, 11 in Kabul city and 60 in Mazar-i Sharif city.

SC chose playgroup locations that would allow for linkages with ongoing SC health, child protection and education activities. The process of developing playgroups began with SC staff meetings with community members to talk about ECD, gauge interest and gain support for starting playgroups. In these meetings, SC staff described the type of person required to be a playgroup facilitator and the venue required to host playgroups. Then, over the following few weeks, communities identified facilitators and venues. The next step was training facilitators (see activity 3 below). After training, the facilitators

opened their playgroups. It was during this time that high levels of SC staff support were required, especially when facilitators were young and needed help with community mobilization and getting parents to send their children and when facilitators could not read and needed help setting up registers. In light of monitoring and evaluation information gathered in June 2003, SC modified its facilitator selection criteria to focus on facilitators sufficiently mature to set up and manage the playgroups. Maturity (age) of the facilitator was found to be a more important factor in playgroup success than literacy was.

In all areas where SC helped communities establish playgroups, baseline information was collected and analyzed. The first method for analysis was developed at the beginning of the project and involved collecting substantial quantities of written data that was difficult to analyze. The method was updated in April 2003 to include participatory activities, the results of which could be recorded as pictures, charts or lists and were thus easier to analyze irrespective of the data collector's literacy and language skills.

NOTE: In October 2003 in Shi Khan and Khoja Hasan villages, WFP distributed high protein biscuits at schools, and playgroup facilitators reported a drop in children's attendance because, instead of attending their playgroups children were attending school to get the biscuits. SC staff asked head teachers if they had had any guidelines from WFP about who should receive biscuits, and they said no. Given the social dynamics in both villages, it was difficult for female playgroup facilitators to suggest to head teachers that playgroups receive a supply of biscuits for distribution to the children attending playgroups rather than have them attend school, in an essentially disruptive and meaningless way, for a month. SC contacted WFP about the way in which food-for-education is promoting under-age enrolment in primary school, citing this situation as an example.

3. Training SC playgroup facilitators and establishing playgroups

Between April 2003 and August 2003, SC staff trained two or three facilitators for each of the 110 playgroups. The facilitators were all women from the communities that decided to form playgroups, and playgroups took place in their homes. The decision to have two or three facilitators meant that each woman was only required to volunteer a few hours each week – an important consideration when there is no material or financial incentive for leading playgroups. The training of several women to lead playgroups also increased the communities' capacity and possibilities to sustain the playgroups since, if one facilitator was not available, the second or third facilitator could ensure that the playgroups met. However, training 290 facilitators was time consuming and increased the amount of monitoring, evaluation and program development support required by the facilitators. As a result of summer monitoring and evaluation and community preference, SC staff in Kabul and Shomali limited the number of trainers to two per group; but, in Mazar, communities retained three facilitators per group.

Training for trainers and facilitators alike was based on a training manual and associated materials that were developed at the start of the project by SC ECD staff with input from other organizations and under guidance from a consultant. The training was updated and modified throughout the year to include an additional section to train trainers to provide additional information about children's development.

In December in Mazar, SC Kabul staff trained 20 SC Community Health Workers (CHWs), 16 of whom were also playgroup leaders, to use the materials developed in SC Afghan refugee program in Pakistan (and assessed as suitable for use in Afghanistan) to give parents a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities in promoting their young children's development. The aim of the training was to show CHWs and playgroup facilitators how ECD approaches and health messages are linked and to give those CHWs who had been recently trained about parenting some reinforcement about the importance of ECD activities for children's development.

NOTE: The project plan was to conduct this training with all playgroup facilitators, but this proved impossible for a number of reasons: volunteer facilitators could not take the time for training and starting parenting groups and this additional training; and, both literacy and prior experience of being a facilitator or teacher was necessary for the additional training to be meaningful and effective.

4. Preparation of play kits

SC produced 350 ECD play kits, stored in tin trunks, and comprised of 20 items. Local partner organizations, AWRC and SORVACH, and a carpenter were sub-contracted to make the toys, and lengths of rope and balls were purchased.

1. bag of wooden of blocks
2. puzzle box
3. shape inset tray
4. shape peg toy
5. jigsaw puzzle
6. xylophone
7. rattle
8. jingle stick
9. bead threading
10. picture dominoes
11. rounded shapes
12. cloth balls
13. cloth books
14. beanbags
15. blackboard
16. spot dominoes
17. large ball
18. small balls (4)
19. rope (12 meters total: 4 short pieces for skipping and 1 long piece for misc. uses)
20. 5 boxes of colored chalk

It was impossible to finish the 500 kits as planned due to the slow speed and inconsistent quality of SORVACH's toy making. Following a meeting with UNICEF representatives in August 2003, it was mutually agreed that the project would produce 350 kits.

As noted in the mid-term review, there are arguments for and against play kits. During proposal development, UNICEF encouraged SC to use a set of locally made toys and supplement it with materials such as balls and skipping ropes to make a play kit. SC expressed concern about the idea because it was not sustainable and would give impression that play can only happen with special bought or manufactured toys. Both these concerns were validated during the project. Few playgroups used locally available materials or toys, and parents and facilitators focused on having and using SC-provided kits exclusively. Positive aspects of having the play kits were these: since facilitators receive no monetary or material incentive in recognition of their work, having the play kit in their homes as a community resource was recognition of their effort; and, play kits did attract attention to the playgroup.

Clearly, supplying play materials is not sustainable. But, perhaps, neither is expecting communities to rely entirely on their own resources for ECD playgroups. Future support for playgroups needs to find a balance, e.g., supply fewer items, identify items that communities can provide locally and give more training on using locally available materials to make appropriate toys.

5. Distribution of play kits

SC distributed 110 kits to SC-supported playgroups: 60 in Mazar and 50 between Kabul city and Shomali. An additional 105 kits went to partner organizations: 64 in Kabul and 41 in Mazar. The remaining 145 kits will be distributed to partner organizations developing ECD playgroups and to additional SC ECD playgroups to be established in 2004.

6. Support and monitoring for SC/US playgroups

Quarterly reports (1, 2, 3) shared results of SC staff support and monitoring on the quality of facilitation and of care giver participation and understanding in 77 playgroups in Kabul city and Shomali and 105 playgroups in Mazar. After the mid-term evaluation and the Q4 training on using books in playgrounds, the focus of monitoring and support visits was on using locally available materials for teaching and learning materials and toys, using books and keeping attendance registers.

7. Training of trainers in other NGOs/organizations

By January 2004, SC staff had trained 99 trainers from 17 organizations and prepared them to establish playgroups, train facilitators, gather baseline data and provide follow-up support to community facilitators: 91 staff from 13 partner organizations in Kabul and Shomali, and eight trainers from four organizations in Mazar.

By December 2003, CRS had identified 18 sites in Parwan where they planned to train 36-48 community facilitators to set up as many as 48 ECD groups by January 2004. SC/UK was using allotted play kits with the government's Department of Kindergartens as part of its training and development. ACF was setting up playgroups in six clinics in Parwan. AWRC had set up two ECD groups for children whose mothers attend training courses at their vocational training centers. In Kabul city, EmdH planned to establish eight ECD groups in January 2004 as part of their outreach in District 6 for disadvantaged children. At the close of the project, other groups were in process, but dates had not been fixed as to when ECD groups would be established. In Mazar, UN Habitat used the kits for playgroups established at Community For, a center where mothers attend literacy courses; so children attend playgroups while their mothers develop language skills. IAM was using the kits with four playgroups established in Robatak village in Chemtal, Balkh.

8. Selecting books for play kits

A set of 13 books and copies of the children's magazine *Parvaz* were selected for distribution to playgroups supported by SC in the final quarter of the project. The books are these:

1. *The Mat Weaver*
2. *The Three Cows and the Wolf*
3. *Fire in the Jungle*
4. *The Treasure*
5. *The story of the soap*
6. *Jamdad*
7. *Ahmad Saves his Father*
8. *The Pigeon and the Crow*
9. *The Goldfish*
10. *The Red Hen*
11. *The Pigeon and the Ant*
12. *Harvest Time*
13. *Zergai and Jergai*
14. *Donya-e-kodak* (*Child's World*) (Mazar)

Other books are available from the BBC, but they were not in stock in Kabul and the cost of a reprint made them too expensive for this project. Some of the other books are available in the school-based library boxes in Shi Khan and Khoja Hasan. However, playgroup facilitators were reluctant to borrow the books because they hade to go to the school to get them and they felt uncomfortable doing so. Thus, a specific improvement for the future is to ease playgroup leaders' access to books – perhaps by asking husbands or brothers to borrow them from the schools.

Books suitable for young children are almost unavailable in Afghanistan and, while the BBC books were the best found, they were far from ideal. Thus, it was unfortunate that SC was unable to carry out the planned book production activity because playgroup set-up and facilitator training took much more time than anticipated[1].

[1] In October, SC identified a potential partner for book production (AINA—the organization that produces the children's magazine, *Parvaz*). If it can accesses additional funding, SC/US will pursue this activity in 2004.

NOTE: The book *Zergai and Jergai* is a children's book produced by SC in 2002 with a UK media group called Story Circus and is a good example of the type of book suitable for young children. *Donya-e-kodak* contains a selection of Afghan folktales but, due to the large amount of text, was distributed only in Mazar, where virtually all facilitators were literate.

9. Training with SC/US facilitators about sharing books with children

All SC playgroup facilitators participated in short training workshops in Q4 to learn how to use books with young children. The Dari version of the training plan is attached; an English version does not yet exist. The training focused on why people, especially children, read and how facilitators could use the books in the playgroups. Among the facilitators, there was a wide range of reading skill, from none (mainly in Shomali) to fluent and sophisticated readers (mainly in Mazar), so a variety of approaches were adopted. In Mazar and Kabul, most facilitators can read the books to children, but in Shomali facilitators invite friends or school children to read. However, the training encourages book-based activities such as talking about pictures and telling the stories without actually reading them each time.

In Shomali, where SC also works with some of the primary schools, 43 reading volunteers (29 boys and 18 girls) were identified following discussions with head teachers, teachers and school children themselves to visit the playgroups and read to younger children.

10. Mid and end of project evaluation

A mid-term review was carried out in August/September 2003 and submitted with the Q3 report. At that time, SC requested advice from UNICEF about the nature of the final evaluation given that so much had been learned during the review, and it did not seem useful to have a similar process that would not reveal much additional information. SC suggested a combined evaluation and training for ECD staff based on what had been learned during the course of the project. Unfortunately, this did not take place before project funding ended.

Cumulative Report on indicators

Indicator	Progress	Comments
A preliminary study of community awareness of / attitudes towards play in relation to children's learning and development completed	Completed	
% of caregivers in communities with playgroups who can tell about the benefits of play to children's learning and development	Assessed in the mid-term review, which focused on Kabul	100% of respondents were able to describe a variety of specific ways in which play benefits children's learning and development
% of caregivers in communities with playgroups who can report initiating play with children during the last week	Assessed in the mid-term review, which focused on Kabul	64% of women respondents in Shomali 50% of male respondents in Shomali 29% of women respondents in Kabul
% of caregivers in communities with playgroups who can tell a variety of good play situations	Assessed in the mid-term review, which focused on Kabul	All respondents interviewed described good physical situations such as space, warmth, fresh air etc. 10% mentioned availability of toys and other play materials. None mentioned other aspects of good play such as opportunities for talking and listening, problems solving and playing with other children. The question may need to be asked in a different way.
Training playgroup trainer guidelines completed	Completed	Submitted with Q1 report
Training playgroup facilitator guidelines completed	Completed	Submitted with Q1 report
# of families bringing their children to playgroups	1,222	462 Kabul 760 Mazar
# of facilitators trained	290	110 Kabul 180 Mazar
# of children (g/b) regularly attending playgroups	1,920	Kabul: 343 boys, 454 girls Mazar: 535 boys, 588 girls
# of playgroups supported by SC	110	Kabul: 50 Mazar: 60

# of play kits distributed	215	50 Kabul playgroups 60 Mazar playgroups Kabul-based organizations: 26 Save the Children UK 18 Catholic Relief Services 2 Afghan Women's Resource Center 12 Action contre la Faim 6 EMdH Mazar-based organizations: 30 UN Habitat 4 International Assistance Mission 7 Central Asia Free Exchange /Youth Development (YCDP)
# of caregivers sharing books with their own children	Not measured	There was insufficient time to measure this after the introduction of books to playgroups. However, all playgroup facilitators use or facilitate the use of books in their playgroups.
# of trainers in other organizations trained to establish and support playgroups	99	Kabul: 10 Department of Kindergartens 27 ACF 2 SC/UK 2 SC Sweden 2 YCDP 2 International Rescue Committee 1 Horizontal Repopulation of Afgh 2 AWRC 1 Coord of Humanitarian Affairs 4 EmdH 1 Afghan Azad 2 De Afghanistan Bank Nursery 33 CRS Mazar 2 UN Habitat 2 AIM 2 CAFE 2 Department of Kindergartens
# of organizations trained to establish and support playgroups	17	

Review of the Save the Children/UNICEF Community-based Early Childhood Development Project

At the beginning of 2003, Save the Children with support from UNICEF started a community-based Early Childhood Development Project. In Mazar and Kabul cities and in rural communities in Shomali (north of Kabul), Save the Children trained community volunteers to facilitate home-based playgroups. The playgroups meet three times a week for between one and two hours, and on average, around 15 children take part in each playgroup. Each playgroup has two or three facilitators who take it in turns to facilitate the group. They follow a similar simple routine with time for free-play, group games, stories and rhymes. Each playgroup has a metal trunk (a play kit) to supplement local toys and play materials.

In addition to training facilitators, Save the Children has also trained trainers from other organizations several of which have gone on/or will go on to establish playgroups in areas where they work. Play kits have also been supplied (via Save the Children UK) to the government-managed kindergartens to support their training program.

See the summary on page 8 for more information.

The purpose of the review
The purpose of the review of the UNICEF/Save the Children Community-based Early Childhood Development Project was to provide an opportunity for program learning - reflection on progress to date. The review as also conducted to help with planning activities in the last quarter of 2003 and for longer term planning. The review is not intended to be an evaluation. It is also not representative of all locations where playgroups operate, of all parents and children involved or of all facilitators.

Methods used for the ECD review
Interviews with parents were conducted in five locations in Shomali and Kabul city. 54 women were interviewed and 6 men. We wanted to talk with more men but in Shomali the grape harvest was underway and men were not willing to give up time. In Kabul, few men are at home during the day. The purpose of the interview with parents was to find out if parents valued the playgroups and why, thus giving an indication of their awareness of the importance of play for children's development, and to find out of they know what happens at playgroup. The collated responses from parents are on pages 10 – 17.

We met with two groups of facilitators (10 in Khoja Hasan and 16 in Shi Khan) to find out what they valued in playgroups in terms of children's development and about their feelings about the playgroups more generally. In one group where all the facilitators were all teenage girls we did a drawing activity and based discussions around the drawings facilitators had made. We asked facilitators to draw things children do at playgroup – especially the good things. The method was limited by what facilitators thought they could draw well but in fact there was lots to talk about and it was a good basis for discussion. In the other group with older, married women facilitators we did a brainstorm and listed then ranked the benefits of playgroup for children.

With both groups of facilitators we discussed the introduction of books. We took with us a selection of books we are considering using in the playgroups. Of the 26 facilitators we met for the review two can read. We were therefore especially interested to see what ideas women had for sharing them with the children

For the review, we also collated and discussed information collected on 40 monitoring visits made to playgroups in Kabul city and Shomali in June, July and August.


Save the Children.
Programs with Afghans

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